



Winning Portland firefighter memorial design would cost about \$2.4 million

By Special to The Oregonian

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Whelton Architecture

An early version of the winning memorial design shows lanterns atop poles at varying lengths to reflect the length of service of each of Portland's 36 fallen firefighters.

A proposed new memorial to Portland's fallen firefighters could become a stirring addition to the city's waterfront, but it comes with a big question mark: Can backers meet the roughly \$2.4 million price tag?

A selection committee announced the winner of a memorial design competition Monday: Portland architect **Aaron Whelton**, who beat out six others.

His plan for a swath of land at the east end of the Hawthorne Bridge calls for 36 light poles representing each of the city's fallen firefighters and pole heights reflecting their length of service. It also would include a wall bearing the firefighters' names and a water feature.

City Commissioners Randy Leonard and Nick Fish and firefighter Paul Corah unanimously picked the design. "We like the idea of honoring the firefighters in lighted modes," Corah said. "It was just kind of a nice courtyard effect."

The new memorial would become the focal point for annual ceremonies honoring Portland's firefighters -- instead of the current memorial along Burnside.

Partially at the behest of critics who want to preserve the existing memorial, Leonard said supporters have agreed to take only a large bell from it for the new memorial, but leave two lanterns and a relief depicting David Campbell, a fire chief killed in 1911, while battling one of the era's largest local blazes.

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It's still not clear who will take care of the current memorial if the new one comes to pass. The limestone structure sits in a small wedge along West Burnside and 19th Avenue and, firefighters say, is in disrepair.

"The message was finally received," said Jon Gustafson, who started a Facebook group to save the Campbell memorial. "I think everyone working on the new memorial had the best intentions. I just thought they didn't give any thought to the existing one."

In the meantime, Leonard, a former firefighter who oversees the Portland Fire Bureau, said he hopes to raise the \$2.4 million by next January through mostly private donations. That would leave enough time to have the monument constructed by the yearly service in June 2011, he said.

He acknowledged that's a lot to ask in cash- and job-strapped Portland, but said that the community's ties to its firefighters should garner donations -- large and small. He hopes to do things such as sell plaques with donor names.

"I'm getting that it's a challenge and I'm up to the challenge," he said. "I think a lot of people in the community will connect with the enthusiasm that the firefighters have to build an appropriate memorial. It's just a really unique opportunity."

It's possible the current memorial, now under the upkeep of the David Campbell Memorial Association, could be turned over to Portland's Bureau of Parks & Recreation or placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

But there are no current plans for either, and Leonard expressed hope that a private group -- maybe even some of the online critics -- will step up to take care of the monument.

"There were those who said don't get rid of it," he said. "If there are those in the community who want to raise funds to maintain it, that would be great. We want it to be honored as well, and we're not just gonna abandon it."

-- Dirk VanderHart, Special to The Oregonian

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